Critical Discourse Analysis as a tool for Citizenship Education

Dr Jane Mulderrig
School of English
University of Sheffield, UK
www.sheffield.ac.uk/english/people/mulderrig

Dr David Hyatt
School of Education
University of Sheffield, UK

NECE Conference
Thessaloniki, 20th Oct 2015
Outline

- Critical Discourse Analysis as a model for teaching critical (digital) literacy in schools
- Case Study: media representation of the EU refugee crisis
Why Analyse Discourse?

‘Discourse is socially constitutive as well as socially shaped: it constitutes situations, objects of knowledge, and the social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people’

(Fairclough, Mulderrig, Wodak, 2011)

‘Language, instead of drawing meanings passively from pre-existing knowledge of the world, plays an active role in classifying the phenomena and experiences through which individuals construct, understand and represent reality’

(Hyatt, 2005)
Critical Discourse Analysis

‘An explicitly emancipatory and transdisciplinary approach to social research which subsumes a variety of theoretical models and analytical methods. It is concerned with the semiotic dimensions of power, injustice, abuse, and political-economic or cultural change in society’

(Mulderrig, 2015)

Combines detailed textual analysis with analysis of the social practices within which texts are embedded

Theoretical origins: linguistics (Functional Grammar, Literary theory, argumentation), neo-Marxism (Althusser, Gramsci, Laclau), post-structuralism (Habermas, Foucault, Bourdieu)
CDA as Critical Citizenship Education

We contend that CDA offers a toolkit for the critical deconstruction of the discourses that construct the contested and contestable notion of ‘citizenship’, and offers spaces and avenues for the reconstruction of citizenship in more socially just ways.

It can be used as part of citizenship education for fostering the critical, digitally literate generation of tomorrow.

(See Hyatt, 2005)
Flexible Text Analytical Framework

Aims to present a model of critical discourse analysis which is accessible to school students.

The list is not exhaustive; aims to encourage students to explore other dimensions as relevant to the topic under investigation.
1. **Text Organisation**
   - *Text type (genre)*
   - *Words and Images*

2. **Mixing Texts**
   - *‘Patchwork’ texts*
   - *Borrowed conventions*

3. **Describing People**
   - *Agents or Patients? Individuals or Groups? Valued or Devalued?*

4. **Describing Actions**
   - *What kinds of actions in what circumstances?*
Summary of the Framework (2)

5. Word choices
   - Metaphor (‘a *tide* of refugees’)
   - Pronouns (we, our, us, them...)
   - Evaluation (good, bad, freedom, illegal, normal, efficient...)

6. Hidden Meanings
   - Assumptions (we all *know*; *isn’t it* true that?; why *did you* change your policy on immigration, Prime Minister?)
   - Hidden Agency (the *study showed*; *it was* revealed)
‘It’s life and death’
The Sun (editorial, 3 Sep 2015)

- Main topic of article: refugee crisis

- Analysis of: social actors, social actions, pronouns, metaphor

- Key finding: the article redefines the social category ‘migrant’ to suit its banal nationalist agenda
Social Actors in the text

Activated Actors

- Britain: 18
- Refugees: 8
- Migrants: 8
- Migrants and Refugees: 2
- The Sun: 4
- Cameron: 2
- Europe: 1
- MPs: 1
Defending ‘us’

Britain has rightly held back the thousands massed at Calais

[Britain] is making our welfare system less attractive to those tempted to join them

Britain must help re-establish law and order in Libya too

We can only commit resources to carrying out rigorous checks.
Defining ‘them’ as legitimate: refugees

- One **drowned** as his parents **fled** war-torn Syria for safety in Europe.
- The other **was born** at a refugee camp at a rail station.
- But **there are** others who, with their kids, **have fled** imminent danger in Syria.
Defining ‘them’ as illegitimate: *migrants*

- They are *fleeing* no one
- They are *not persecuted*
- [we should not buckle to] the tide of migrants *seeking solely to escape poverty back home* *scrambling to enter* Britain illegally
- many of them [are] *merely economic migrants*
- They cannot be Europe’s problem, or Britain’s
Mobilising fear: ‘they’ are an economic threat

- We know well the pressure from Britain’s soaring population on our public services and housing.
- Britain has rightly held back the thousands massed at Calais.
- [Britain] is making our welfare system less attractive to those tempted to join [the Calais migrants].
- Sorting genuine asylum seekers from economic migrants is hard.
- The latter [migrants] pose as the former [refugees].
Closing Borders by Merging Social Categories

‘Europe meanwhile must temporarily seal national borders; establish how many **migrants and refugees** are already here, and where they are. They must not be free to travel wherever they please in the EU the moment they set foot on the continent’

- **Aggregation:** This merging of is facilitated by the impersonal and ultimately dehumanising ways in which both categories of actor are represented (*thousands massed; biggest movement of refugees since WW2*)

- **Metaphor:** While our sympathies should be differentiated, both groups are construed as a burden (*a tide, engulfing; paralysing Europe*)
Who’s views are these? Pronouns and Banal Nationalism

Britain: most textually prominent actor, partly realised through inclusive ‘we’

1. [Britain is rightly] making our welfare system less attractive [to migrants]
2. We know well the pressure from Britain’s soaring population on our public services and housing
3. our nation also has a proud record of taking in desperate people
4. we should not flinch from it now if it is beyond doubt they have fled for their lives
5. We can only commit resources to carrying out rigorous checks [to identify genuine refugees]
6. Our vast overseas aid budget could be diverted to fund [the reestablishment of law and order in Libya]
Summary

By juxtaposing in the same text the plight of refugees fleeing war with economic migrants, the article downgrades the importance of poverty and dismisses the legitimacy of seeking a better life.

The article conflates *refugee* and *economic migrant* representing both as a burden and threat, and calling for aid budgets to be diverted to pay for military intervention in Syria and Libya.

This evokes a complex and contradictory blend of:
- neoliberal rationality to eschew welfarist solutions to poverty in favour of individual responsibility to find work, and a
- neoconservative concern to defend ‘our’ nation-state and its borders from continued external threat
- The ironic result is to close off the very same opportunities to work which neoliberalism advocates.
Concluding Remarks: CDA and critical citizenship education

- Viewing Citizenship as ‘a communicative achievement’ (Fairclough et. al. 2006) through language and other forms of semiosis

- Citizenship education offers a place to challenge representations of individuals and groups that marginalise, diminish and ‘other’ them

- Critical discourse analysis offers a framework for systematic and principled engagement with texts and for understanding their social impact
References


https://sheffield.academia.edu/JaneMulderrig